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**A BRIEF DESCRIPTION
OF THE AYAHUALULCO
LASALLIAN COMMUNITY**

Existence

Has been in existence since 1974. Is made up of Brothers and youth volunteers. The group lives, works and prays together among the local population on the slopes of the Pico de Orizaba volcano.

Reasons for being there.

The main reason is to make ourselves aware of the poverty and primitive living conditions of the peasant community. Our aim is to share their daily lives while trying to teach them to achieve freedom. This we hope to do by getting to know the conditions in which they live, by analysing them and, with the guidance of God's Word, making some specific decisions to help them to find dignity as human beings.

Main aim.

For the 13 years the team has worked here, the aim has always been to pick out from among the peasants, and to train, potential leaders capable of motivating and organising the others, and of getting them to undertake the task of improving their own conditions and those of the community.

Small group meetings.

We have used small group meetings as a means of making ourselves aware of the living conditions of the peasants, their basic needs and their ability to cope.

A gradual process.

Little by little, the main areas of concern became clear and leaders capable of organising their fellows have come forward.

Health.

Our main concern here is to make the peasants realise the importance of their health and life; the need of prophylactics and of going to the clinic in case of illness or accident; and the need to improve their food.

Production of goods.

The aim here is to improve, diversify and increase the production of foodstuffs so as to generate enough income to enable families to live with some sort of dignity. It is also to improve sowing techniques and the care of fruit trees; to encourage family vegetable plots, the planting of small areas of woodland; to increase the production of manufactured articles like wood carvings, simple dresses, bread, jam and so on.

Marketing.

Here the intention is to ensure a higher and fairer income. This is closely linked with the question of producing goods. It faces almost insurmountable problems because of the sharp practices of the middle-men, and the lack of funding for the producers and for the setting up an independent system of transport for the goods.

In addition to these very basic and urgent needs (life, health, food, a roof over one's head, basic clothing and footwear) there are also other areas of concern, like the following:

Education.

The aim here is to educate people sufficiently to enable them to know, to master and to transform the natural environment in which they live, so as to be free to take their position in society with a fair chance of being a success and not being doomed to failure because of their own ignorance or the exploitation of others. This implies also a process of education at a personal, family and society level within their peasant community without leading them to abandon their roots or their traditional values.

Most of our work and financial resources are concentrated at present in this area. We give our support to pre-schooling and primary education, and three years ago, we started secondary level agricultural courses by radio.

Society.

The aim here is to help the peasants to take their place in society and take part in its activities, while preserving what is valuable in their background and traditions. It is also to encourage them to work together and so enable them to get themselves organised and to improve their standard of life. The aim is also to teach them how to vote, how to demand their rights and how to fulfil their civic duties. In this way a just and democratic society will be built.

Religion.

What we are attempting here is to make it possible to live our daily lives “sub specie aeternitatis”, as God’s children; our daily life together filled with brotherly affection inspired by the words of Jesus; every moment of the day a celebration, an act of thanksgiving which culminate naturally at the eucharistic assembly. The peasants’ lives, work, sufferings and joys will find in this way their inspiration in the Word of God and in its practice. It is with a view to this that we work closely with the diocesan and parish pastoral care organisers. The maturity of our peasants is quite remarkable, especially in our religious discussion and prayer groups.

Our contribution to the local people.

This has been very extensive and includes the following: roads, bridges, classrooms, help in the parish, roofing, a reception centre for Alcoholics Anonymous, buying land for future village developments, a clinic, a clothes shop, a vast amount of basic foodstuffs like milk and cheese, teaching materials, libraries, loans, etc. All this was made possible by gifts from friends and various organisations.

Numerous obstacles.

There are many things that make it difficult to turn these peasants into fully free human

beings, as for example: chronic malnutrition since birth, lack of hygiene, promiscuity, abuse of alcohol, family feuds, individuals working alone, negligence in sending children to school, domineering role of the male in the family, the herd instinct in the face of community or town problems, distrust among more politically aware groups, lack of funds when needed, impoverished economy, advertisement campaigns for worthless or superfluous goods that create needs that are false and are beyond the means of the peasants to satisfy, the beginning of family quarrels for religious reasons inspired by the preaching of fanatical Protestant sects, etc.

All this slows down our work and makes it more difficult, but we remain convinced that man’s ability to surpass himself, the power of the Word of God and our own determination will one day bear abundant fruit.

What keeps us going.

What keeps us going is the never-ending cry for help from thousands of our fellow human beings who still live in abject poverty, who are oppressed and discriminated against by members of their own race and creed; it is the Word of God through which the Spirit challenges us, and which the Church and the Institute are now reading again in a new light; it is the hope to see once again one day our country and this American continent of ours living as God our Father would want us to, with brotherly love inspired by his Word, and with the same opportunities as everybody else in the world. This is a Utopian dream which will come true at the Second Coming of the Son of Man who will judge us according to what we have done and not done: “I was hungry and you gave me to eat... When...? Whatever you did to the least of my brethren, you did it to me...”

Brother Juan Bosco Morales